MASS. Y3. L-P1 : T68/3/folder

UMASS/AMHERST
312066 0284 3528 4

TRANSIT 1990's

A Strategic Plan for the Next Decade

Letter from the Transit 1990's Chairman

The decade of the 1990's promises to be a period of unmatched challenges and opportunities for mass transportation within the Pioneer Valley. For twenty months, the Transit 1990's Task Force has undertaken both a review of the region's mass transportation needs and an independent assessment of the valley's largest public transit carrier, the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA).

The viability of mass transportation in the Pioneer Valley in the 1990's necessitates community involvement and a renewed partnership of the public and private sectors. We expect that this presentation of our findings and recommendations will prove informative and encourage discussion and concern about the future and potential of mass transit.

We on the Task Force are enthusiastic and confident that with immediate change, planning, management, and, most importantly, a "sense of vision," the valley's mass transit system can, by the year 2000, be nothing less than a national model.

James C. Moynihan
Chairman
February 1991

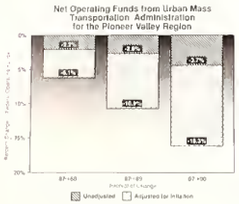
Photo courtesy Springfield Newspapers.

Transit Faces Crucial Challenges in this Decade

A vibrant and prosperous metropolitan area has a number of features: a well-trained labor force, educational opportunities, a diverse economic base, stable government, a clean environment and a sound transportation system. Whenever one of these resources is threatened, it is vital that a concerted effort be mounted to protect and strengthen it.

A case in point is public transportation in the Pioneer Valley region. The specter of change in this important service is sobering. Costs are up, the number of riders is down compared to five years ago and revenue sources have remained static or diminished. Today, the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA) faces a substantial deficit for the first time in recent memory.

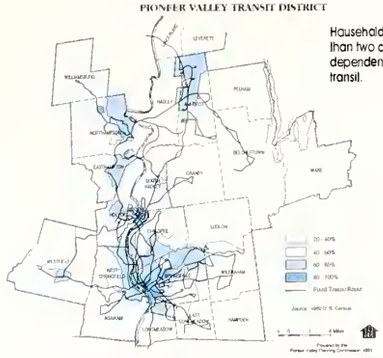
The Transit 1990's Task Force was established in April, 1989 to deal with the impending crisis. It reviewed, considered and discussed the history and operation of PVTA services. The Authority was established in 1974 under new state legislation to rescue and rejuvenate public transportation in the valley. A massive infusion of federal and state capital funds provided for a fleet of over 200 new buses and over 70 vans, along with garage and office facilities, in the course of the ensuing decade. Operating assistance has also been received annually from both the federal and state levels to help defray the costs of providing public transportation.



However, the warning signals for public transportation are clearly tolling as the decade of the 1990's commences. Public mass transit in our region has always had certain inherent or perceived problems that hampered its acceptance and the widespread use of its services. Bus service is considered to be slow and inflexible for trips to and from work locations. Riders must generally tailor their personal schedules to the bus schedule, rather than have transit service meet their needs. Further, our valley is "blessed" by excellent interstate connections (I-90, I-91, I-291 and I-391) and convenient parking locations for vehicles in our central business districts and suburban office parks. In addition, motorists pay a relatively low price for gasoline. In fact, we believe that is particularly revealing to note that vehicle registrations in the valley are increasing at a rate faster than that of the region's population.

The Task Force does not, in its vision for the 1990's, expect that there will be a fundamental change in the public's perception of public transit. Consequently, we believe that any plan for the 1990's must assume that the social, economic, and institutional factors described above will continue to serve as the backdrop for public transit service in the Pioneer Valley.

Percentage of Households with 0 or 1 Car
PIONEER VALLEY TRANSIT DISTRICT



Households with fewer than two cars are often dependent on public transit.

Disturbing Trends Demand Private and Public Sector Action

While we recognize that the PVTA system "looked good" in relation to comparable systems elsewhere in the nation, the Task Force notes that three disturbing trends emerged during the 1980's which will, in the Task Force's judgement, severely challenge the capacity of the PVTA administration and advisory board to continue to provide economical and high-quality public transit services. The first trend is a decline in revenue for public transit. All of the sources of revenue for public transportation are either shrinking or under enormous pressure as federal and state agencies grapple with both limited resources and a potential redefinition of the role and services to be provided by government. Federal funds, which currently provide about 22.5% of transit operating revenues, are subject to the limitations of the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings deficit reduction law. In addition, the Bush administration has announced its intention to eliminate operating subsidies for regular, fixed-route transit service, starting with the largest metropolitan areas. In Massachusetts, the legislature and administration continue to struggle with dramatic revenue shortfalls. This, increases from the state, which currently provides 28.7% of the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority's operating revenue, cannot be expected; rather, a decrease seems a more realistic prospect. Local sources, principally municipalities, provide 23.4% of PVTA revenues, and they are subject to the limitations imposed by Proposition 2 1/2, which grow more stringent as inflation exceeds 2 1 2%. All but a tiny portion of the remaining 25.4% of operating revenues comes from fares.

The second troubling trend is a decline in ridership on fixed-route bus services. Five of the past six years have shown a decline in riders from the previous year. The total drop in ridership between 1985 and 1989 was 10.9%, decreasing from 12,853,807 to 11,451,534 riders. While we believe that there are several factors which have influenced the decline, including an aging population and higher incomes in the region, the Task Force perceives this trend to be disturbing and believes that the ridership decline raises serious questions concerning PVTA's ability to respond quickly and innovatively to market trends, which would, in turn, boost ridership.

The third trend is the dispersion of new housing and other development into outlying suburban and rural areas. This has caused population density to decrease in traditional urban centers, where transit service is concentrated. At the same time, extensive development of open land in suburban and rural areas has occurred at very low densities, which makes it virtually impossible to serve these areas efficiently with the present modes of public transportation. Clearly, the low density spread development pattern, which characterized the1980's, has had an adverse impact on the PVTA and bus patronage.

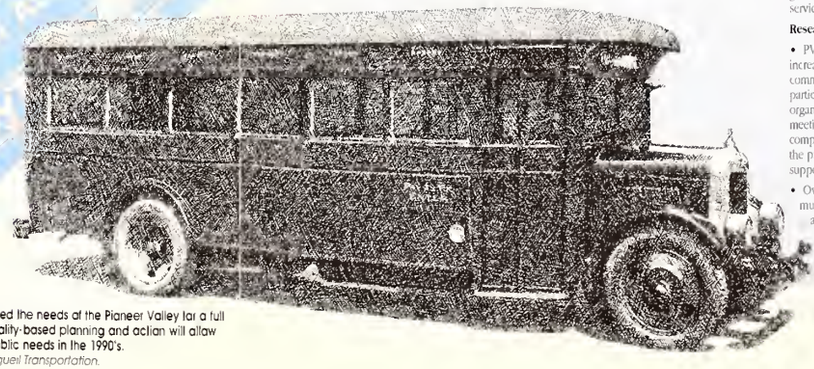
Make no mistake. A continuation of the above regional trends, coupled with actual and perceived realities about public transportation, will cause the demise of public transportation in our region. To counter this, our community must exhibit foresight, creativity and efficiency to ensure that fiscal resources for transit are spent in an efficient and market-responsive manner.

The Task Force views the situation as challenging, but not yet impossible. A number of other metropolitan transit districts have faced such situations and have taken decisive actions that transformed ineffective systems into dynamic, responsive ones. San Francisco and Washington, D.C. have accomplished major improvements by developing rail commuter and subway systems, Sacramento created a light rail spine with bus and van feeders, Toronto stresses integration of several transit modes, Madison uses transit centers to the east and west of the downtown, and Austin has gone to a totally fare-free operation. In each case, there has been a healthy and aggressive planning effort that was sustained over a period of several years to devise a transformed system that vastly improved the mobility of people in the area.

While the Transit 1990's Task Force recognizes that some transit systems, such as Buffalo's, have shut down due to their failures to solve problems of finding sources of funding, we remain optimistic that similar occurrences will not befall either the PVTA or this region. Nevertheless, the "clock is already ticking" and PVTA must, in cooperation with others, consider its future and the region's transit needs, responsibly estimate the availability of funding, and respond accordingly.

Transit policy and management in the region over the next several years needs to be aimed toward cost effectiveness. Consolidation of some operations and joint purchase of goods and services should yield substantial savings without any loss in service to the consumer. Other actions, while clearly necessary, will not be painless. Efforts need to be concentrated on making the most of existing and expected resources—in other words, being more productive. Creativity needs to be applied to minimize the pain and serve as many transportation needs as possible.

PVTA should examine the viability of replacing some of its larger buses with smaller vehicles to gain better fuel mileage, lower maintenance costs and lower driver wage rates.
Photo courtesy PVTA.



Mass transit has served the needs of the Pioneer Valley for a full century. Careful, reality-based planning and action will allow the PVTA to meet public needs in the 1990's.
Photo courtesy Longuel Transportation.

TRANSIT 1990's

Competitiveness ... Quality... Vision

Transit 1990's Plan for Action

The challenges of the next decade and beyond can only be met through insightful planning and decisive action. Transit 1990's recommendations are designed to encourage all of us to work together to insure a viable future for public transit service in our region.

Routes & Fares ...

- PVTA must increase the frequency, hours and days of service on specific routes as a response to consumer needs. This will help attract new riders and simultaneously provide an opportunity to retain customers by increasing the attractiveness of public transit and providing more travel opportunities for existing riders.
- As a cost-saving measure, PVTA must continually monitor and evaluate the performance of individual fixed routes to determine the times of peak ridership and tailor the size of vehicles to the route's peak and off-peak ridership levels. PVTA should use small buses or vans when feasible to attract riders from suburban areas while achieving savings in labor, fuel, maintenance and capital equipment costs.
- PVTA needs to establish a philosophy concerning the assessment of passenger fares. Users of fixed route services are often those who have minimal income. As the limitations upon public funding continue, will PVTA seek to shift the financial burden to its riders, and if so, what percentage will the riders be asked to bear? Further, if a greater fiscal burden is placed on the riders, does not PVTA run the risk of "driving away" its own customers and supporters? One alternative would be for PVTA to consider "shrinking" its fixed route system, reducing costs while maintaining a certain level of rider revenue (dollar amount or percentage). If this is successful, PVTA should assess the long-term potential of a system with either a fare reduction or elimination.
- PVTA should organize low-ridership services to focus on subregional hubs that would, in turn, be strongly linked together by frequent fixed-route or express bus services.
- PVTA should establish transit centers at the subregional hubs where linkages between local buses, express buses, paratransit, intercity buses, and taxis would be developed, and where comfortable waiting areas and travelers' services would be available.
- PVTA must evaluate, and implement where feasible, more flexible transit services, including dial-a-ride, shared taxi and jitney systems. The type of services utilized should depend upon the needs of the areas to be served.
- Working closely with the private sector, PVTA should establish, on a trial basis, express buses and/or expand its park-and-ride programs if market research indicates sufficient demand and the fiscal resources allow, either via fares, outside contributions or public funding. PVTA should go after the park-and-ride customer with small vehicles and frequent services with the support of businesses. The Task Force notes that park-and-ride pmgrams necessitate PVTA cooperation with public agencies and a continued availability of transit services to and fmm the parking areas. Park-and-ride programs in PVTA's largest member municipality, Springfield, have generated mixed results. PVTA is urged to provide whatever support or contribution of its resources it can to assist municipalities to reduce the number of vehicles that drive on central business district streets.
- PVTA should strive to expand special transportation services to elders in order to meet current needs and to keep pace with the projected increase in numbers of that population segment. PVTA should also assess the social and economic costs and benefits of combining special transportation service areas, including impacts on ridership, accessibility and administration.
- PVTA should move immediately to eliminate waiting lists by expanding subscription service for disabled riders, particularly during peak morning and afternoon periods, to enable this population to get to and from school and work more easily. Further, PVTA must assess the impacts and implications of the recent Americans with Disabilities Act and implement required changes with regard to accessibiliy to public transit services.

"Downtown Springfield businesses provide employment for approximately 20,000 people. One of the many advantages of working downtown is the dependable transit service that makes commuting easy, minimizes street congestion and protects our environment. Insuring the economic viability of the transit system is essential."

Carla A. Marchetti
Executive Director
Springfield Central

"I look forward to working with the PVTA to meet the transit challenges of the 1990's, and am hopeful that with my efforts on the federal level, combined with sensible decision-making on the part of PVTA management, we can provide the people of the Pioneer Valley with the transit services they need."

Silvia O. Conte
Congressman
First District

Revenue Management ...

- PVTA should make sure that revenues equal expenditures. In fiscal year 1990 PVTA drew upon unused funding from previous years. The Authority's "reserve funds" from prior years are now gone. PVTA transit services must be provided based upon reliable annual financial projections.
- The PVTA needs a long term view of the eventual need to allocate scarce resources among competing demands. It must anticipate fiscal conditions, and devise ways to carefully and fairly evaluate transportation service needs. A strong and effective management capacity within the PVTA is a must.
- PVTA must adhere to federal and state guidelines in the awarding of fixed route service contracts.

Research & Planning ...

- PVTA must, via its administrative staff, increase its awareness of the private sector and community needs by having PVTA staff participate in community and business organizations and activities and schedule meetings with chief executive officers of local companies or their representatives. In turn, the private sector must contribute its ideas and support to public transit.
- Owners of private properties or businesses must work with the PVTA to determine appropriate levels of service. PVTA must increase its contact with businesses and not plan fixed runs in isolation of those businesses' needs or desires. Moreover, PVTA should aggressively forge new partnerships and pursue funding assistance in cases where businesses benefit directly. Where benefits are shared, so too should the costs be shared.
- PVTA should continue to engage the services of the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission for transit planning and strive to improve interagency coordination, cooperation, and communication to assure that transit planning is an integral part of the region's comprehensive transportation planning process.
- PVTA must develop criteria and establish minimum standards to insure, on an ongoing basis, the necessity of the individual routes of the PVTA's fixed-route bus system. The standards could, for example, be based on a minimum number of passenger trips per mile, or a specific number of riders per day. Based upon their review, the PVTA should eliminate little-traveled routes and runs or alter them to function more effectively.
- Active participants from the private and public sectors should cooperate with the PVTA in a study of the feasibility of light rail transit connecting Amherst, Northampton, Holyoke, Chicopee, and Springfield, possibly extending to Enfield and Bradley International Airport.

"I read the Executive Summary of the Transit 1990 Task Force with great interest because I have had a longstanding commitment to public transportation. During my years as Mayor of the City of Springfield I not only witnessed how many people depended on public transportation but I also grew to appreciate how valuable the services of the PVTA are. As a Member of the 102nd Congress I will continue my efforts in support of legislation that will ensure the highest possible funding for public transportation needs."

Richard E. Neal
Congressman
Second District

Land Use Policy Initiative ...

- PVTA and the valley's municipalities must support and adopt creative land use policies at the regional and local levels that are supportive of transit services, including consideration of transit facilities, such as bus lanes and appropriate, sheltered waiting areas in new and substantially rehabilitated developments. Zoning bylaws and ordinances that encourage gross residential densities to be at least seven dwelling units per acre should be adopted in areas where public transit service is desired.

Communications ...

- PVTA should combat the decline in its ridership by instituting and maintaining a marketing effort that includes identifying markets, promoting ridership and increasing PVTA's advertising and promotional revenues. PVTA should consider "whole bus" exterior ads if the revenue would be significant.
- PVTA should increase its involvement and awareness relative to national and state legislation. PVTA should monitor progress on appropriation bills and join with trade associations in supporting transit subsidies.

"I recommend that attention be paid to the need for transportation to companies outside the city. These employers may want to hire our inner city clients — but the clients will depend on public transportation to get to work. Now, these people are often unable to continue working because they can't get to the job."

Orlanda Isaza
Director at the Springfield North Welfare Office

The Transit Forum

Q&A

Q. Why is it essential that we have a quality public transit system here in the Pioneer Valley?

A. There were over 11-1/2 million rides on PVTA buses during the past year. The transit system helps support the region's economy by getting people to their workplaces and to shopping areas. It also helps reduce congestion and improve air quality, two benefits that are likely to become increasingly important in coming years. (A quick look at Los Angeles' auto-based culture affirms the value of alternate modes of transportation.) Finally, it provides mobility to those who might not own a car or be licensed to drive, while it offers others a choice when their own vehicle is not available.

Q. What will happen if the region, led by the PVTA, does not follow the recommendations outlined in this report?

A. The costs of inaction could be high both in financial and human terms. Buffalo's transit system was shut down for a time due to a failure to solve the problems of finding sufficient sources of funds. Providence is locked in a downward spiral of ridership losses, revenue shortages and service cutbacks.

Special transportation vans provide valuable mobility for elderly and disabled residents.
Photo courtesy Pioneer Valley Planning Commission.

The decline or shutdown of public transit in the Pioneer Valley would mean an increase in costs to the public and private sectors due to people's loss of ability to travel to work and shopping, the community's need to provide elderly and handicapped people with basic supports that they were previously able to obtain on their own, and a degradation of the quality of life in our urban and suburban areas.

Q. Government funding for transit services is likely to shrink in upcoming years. How can the PVTA deal with this situation?

A. There may be relatively little that can be done in the short run to alter national transportation policies, so we expect a reduction in federal resources during the next few years. At the same time, we expect that the state, which is under fiscal stress, will have difficulty sustaining its recent level of commitment. Cities and towns are severely limited by "Proposition 2-1/2."

We believe that a two-pronged approach to shoring up the financing of transit services will be effective. First, the system can be made much more cost-effective through a major restructuring of routes and methods of service delivery. Second, costs should be reflected in the fare structure of the system. Where costs are relatively high, such as in low-density areas, fares should be relatively high as well. In highly used corridors where passenger volumes are substantial, fares should be low or eliminated altogether.

If federal and state assistance continue to decline, however, an additional funding source will need to be found. Selling the idea of a dedicated transit tax, if needed, will be far easier if the public believes that the system is efficient and that it truly serves the region's transportation needs. We think that the changes proposed in the Transit 1990's report will help create a flexible and effective transit system that will be highly valued by the region's citizens.

"Our local student operated transit system, which serves the University of Massachusetts campus and surrounding areas, has long been recognized as an essential contributor to the quality of life in this community. The social, economic, and environmental benefits provided by the transit system are irreplaceable."

Marabeth Clapp
Director of Administrative Services
University of Massachusetts

"Public transit is essential to the economic welfare of all. It provides the most efficient and cost-effective method of matching the needs of and opportunities for employees and employers to everyone's benefit."

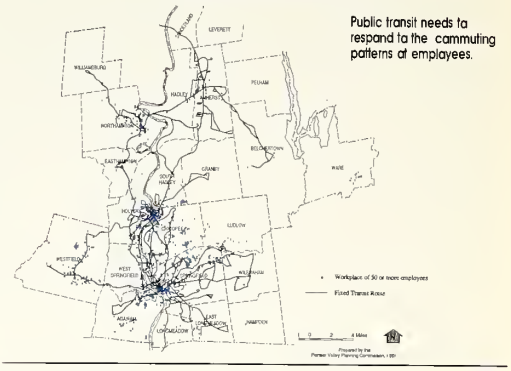
Richard Kimball
President
The Kimball Companies
East Langmeadow

Let's Keep Transit Moving toward the Future

If you are interested in having a presentation on the future of mass transit in the Pioneer Valley, we encourage you to call or write. Our task force is available for participation in your meetings, planning sessions, TV or radio talk shows. Our full report is also available on request. Your comments or input on Transit 1990's findings and plans will be valuable in helping to forge a sound future for transit in the Pioneer Valley. We urge you to share your ideas and concerns with us.

Transit 1990's Task Force
c/o Pioneer Valley Planning Commission
26 Central Street
West Springfield, MA 01089
(413) 781-6045

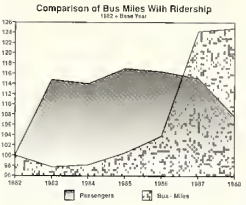
Distribution of Major Employers
PIONEER VALLEY TRANSIT DISTRICT



Q. What can I do to support the future of public transit in the Pioneer Valley?

A. As a citizen, you can contribute your ideas and concerns to the Transit 1990's Task Force. You can make the effort to use public transit when appropriate, while encouraging your family and friends to do the same. You'll save on fuel costs, help conserve our nation's energy resources and do the environment a favor.

If you are an employer, you can take steps to encourage employees to commute to work by public transit. These steps may include appropriate scheduling flexibility, availability of bus passes and, possibly, subsidies for employees' public transit costs.



Q. Not many people currently use public transit to get to work in the Pioneer Valley. How can the PVTA attract more commuters?

A. Currently, public transit is at a disadvantage in attracting commuters; it is slower and less flexible than the automobile; gasoline is still relatively affordable; and transit schedules don't always match workers' schedules.

It will be a challenge to get commuters to leave their cars at home. However, the car is not invulnerable to competition. Many people find the costs of running a car an increasing burden and driving on congested highways to be very stressful. For some, parking at work is inconvenient or expensive. Auto commuting also contributes to individuals' high insurance rates.

Both the private and the public sector should become involved in the development of transit alternatives that can help attract commuters to convenient new ways of getting to work.

TRANSIT 1990'S TASK FORCE COMPOSITION

PVTA Advisory Board
John Clobridge, Chairman
James Boardman, Vice Chairman
Arlene Miller, Member

Regional Joint Transportation Committee
Jack F. Hunter, Planning Director, City of Holyoke

Private Business Sector
Marc Hanks, Economic Development Partners
John Mason, Pyramid Companies
James Moynihan, Westmass Area Development Corp.
Maurie Molod, Holyoke Mall at Ingleside

Elderly & Handicapped Task Force
Richard Mundo, Agawam Council on Aging

Institutions
Allan Byam, UMASS Transit Services, University of Massachusetts
Eileen Zewski, Massachusetts Department of Employment and Training
Marina Lozano, Valley Opportunity Council
Sarah L. Light, Student Services, Westfield State College

Civic Organizations
Linda Olney, League of Women Voters
Frederick Q. Rice, Valley 2000
Marjorie Guess, McKnight Neighborhood Council, Springfield

Ex Officio
Robert D. Manz, Administrator, PVTA
Timothy W. Brennan, Executive Director, PVPC

Staff - PVTA
Marlene B. Connor, Director of Programs & Planning
Jennifer Geran Donais, Director of Marketing & Public Relations

Staff - PVPC
James P. Cope, Principal Planner - Transportation
David Turner, Planner

Major funding for Transit 1990's was provided by the Urban Mass Transportation Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation.

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2015

https://archive.org/details/transit1990sstra00pion

PIONEER VALLEY PLANNING COMMISSION
TRANSIT 1990's TASK FORCE
26 Central Street
West Springfield, MA 01089

Bulk Rate
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT No. 12
West Spfld., MA

The future of public transit in the Pioneer Valley is now riding on us.